

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2023

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 22.10.2023

Accepted: 05.12.2023

Published: 14.12.2023

Citation:

S, Kejapriya, and S. Prabahar. "The Self and the Society: A Critique of Sociocultural Narratives in Media and Literature." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 12, no. S1, 2023, pp. 324–29.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/rtdh.v12iS1-Dec.101>

The Self and the Society: A Critique of Sociocultural Narratives in Media and Literature

Kejapriya S, M.A., NET/JRF., GATE

*Research Scholar, Department of English
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli*

Dr. S. Prabahar

*Dean, Faculty of Indian and Other Languages
Chairperson, School of Languages, Professor and Head
Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli*

Abstract

Sociocultural narratives inextricably form people's self-identification or the identity of a group. It is essential to learn about their History through storytelling, whether from books or oral traditions. Oral traditions can be used to track the sociocultural behaviors of the past and those of the present and their rationale. Additionally, Oral Traditions help one understand and become conscious of the context around a specific practice. In sociocultural views, narrative can serve as a starting point for identifying a suitable framework for explaining how people acquire their identity by learning about History.

The media can tell societal stories through songs, movies, animations, and even other forms of storytelling. The filmmaker reveals to his audience the identity that has been forgotten or the unrecorded History behind it by making his film based on the sociocultural practices or beliefs of the specific group or individual. The present research aims to scrutinize the role of sociocultural narratives in helping individuals and groups discover their identities by illustrating the relationship between sociocultural viewpoints and oral traditions in both Literature and Media.
Keywords: Sociocultural narrative, Self-identity, Oral Traditions, History, Orality, Media.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant literary theorists of the 20th century was Roland Barthes. We will start by examining his ideas regarding narrative. Barthes admits that there are countless stories in the world.

First and foremost, the narrative is a vast array of genres dispersed among many media, as if any medium might accommodate human storytelling. Narrative can be conveyed through spoken or written words, gestures, still or moving images, and an ordered combination of these elements. It can also be found in mythology, legends, fables, tales, novellas, epics, History, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, paintings, stained-glass windows, movies, comics, news articles, and conversations. Furthermore, within this nearly limitless exploration of forms, a tale is inherent in all ears, locations, and social structures;

it originates from human History, and there has never been an individual or a group without a Story or a narrative.

In the forty-five years since Barthes penned this passage, nearly every book on storytelling or narrative theory has referenced this quote. Even if this quote is not referenced directly, often authors simply make a similar statement in their own words. For example, twenty-one years after Barthes voiced his thoughts on narrative, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaceck, authors of *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, stated:

No single period or society can do without narratives. And, a good number of contemporary thinkers hasten to add, whatever you say and think about a certain time or place becomes a narrative in its own right. From the oldest myths and legends to postmodern fabulation, narration has always been central. Postmodern philosophers . . . also contend that everything amounts to a narrative, including the world and the self. If that is correct, then the study of narrative . . . unveils fundamental culture-specific opinions about reality and humankind, which are narrativized in stories and novels. (1)

In its broadest meaning, identity refers to distinguishing and integrating one's sense of self along various social and personal dimensions. As a result, identities can be distinguished and asserted by diverse sociocultural classifications, such as gender, age, race, occupation, gang affiliation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, class or national or regional area. Three challenges face any claim to identity. The first challenge is the construction of agency as constituted by self and world; the next is the person's uniqueness; the third is the sameness of a sense of constant change. There is a claim that identity separates from continuity. Michael Bamberg, in his article *Who am I? Narration and its contribution to selfidentity claim that diminishing stories to their subject matter irreversibly reduces identity to being represented at the symbolic or referential level of speech activities in daily life where identities are created, performed, and constructed. However, narrative plays a significant role in creating and navigating identities as part of daily activities. It can orient towards the human good within the context of everyday practice.*

Reducing narratives to what they are about irrevocably reduces identity to be depicted at the representational or referential level of speech activities disregarding the everyday life activities in which identities are under construction, formed, and performed. However it is within the space of everyday talk in interaction that narration plays an important function in the formation and navigation of identities as part of everyday practices and for its potential function to orient toward "the human good" (Michael5).

Finding an identity The folklore woven into many written texts can help us move beyond the immediacy of the struggle for survival to more long-term health. One lesson that is taught often is the importance of seeking and discovering identity. This emphasis on the quest for identity is a central one to folklore. (Metting 287).

More general sociocultural theory, which evolved from the views of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, gave rise to a sociocultural approach to literacy. Three key ideas from sociocultural theory have influenced a new understanding of literacy: genetic analysis, social learning, and meditation. It is important to note that though Vygotsky proposed a new approach to sociocultural theory, he did not address narration in great detail. Most of the theories he formulated in his lifetime dealt with psychology rather than literacy. This gap most likely reflects his dedication to enlightenment rationalism but with some ambivalence.

Discourse is a formative of values, meanings, and knowledge rather than an unbiased medium for their formation and transmission across boundaries. It is insufficient to understand conversation only in terms of language users' intents or as a harmless reflection of non-linguistic meaning. Instead, meaning is constructed by conversation. Even if social activities and material items exist outside of language, language gives them meaning and helps to shape discourse about them.

Bakhtin proposed that “Language is a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers,” challenging the idea that language is either an individual form of activity or an abstract system of linguistic form. According to Bakhtin, every speech or writing has dialogic overtones since it is built on “echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the community” of communication. Every person has a different speech experience influenced by ongoing interaction and is defined by a “process of assimilation more or less creative of other’s word. A discourse is a socially accepted association between ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artefacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting. These ways of using language can signal that one is acting in a role that has social significance or to identify oneself as a member of a group that is socially meaningful within a social network. Discourse theorists, therefore, view social learning as considerably more complicated. Learners who join a community of practice need to integrate sophisticated language use patterns in social contexts in addition to language and syntax in a creative way.

A discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group of ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaning role (Gee131).

While talking about oral traditions, it is also inevitable to talk about folklore and traditions. Oral literature refers to the standard literary forms in non-writing societies. The legacy in written civilizations where some genres are passed down orally only to the so-called folk is also called oral literature. Probably the best term to describe these two senses is oral literature. Both are covered by the term ‘oral’; however, it is essential to distinguish between the two. Oral tradition, also known as folk literature, is inextricably linked to the elite written culture, even though some forms, like the folktale, persist, particularly among the uneducated members of the complex communities. Oral literature has been replaced by the terms standardized oral forms and oral genres, according to scholars. However, because world literature is so widely used, it must be considered, even though it is crucial to remember the critical distinctions between the two registers, oral and written, and how the latter affects the spoken language. The introduction of writing has significantly impacted speech since it adds a new register or speech. Writing has had a profound impact on society, yet for a significant chunk of recorded History, only a tiny, privileged minority could read and write, with the majority still relying solely on oral communication. These two customs coexisted side by side in numerous instances. A trend exists today to read back elements of literature writing, including the usage of narrative structure, into solely oral genres, which complicates understanding the many genres of oral literature.

Folklore often refers to some spoken activities of sophisticated, literate societies in which only a tiny percentage of the population is literate. This scenario frequently affects the peasantry, particularly in post-Bronze age cultures in Europe and Asia. Even while there are some parallels between these activities and those in purely oral cultures, the literary styles that are always prevalent, especially those associated with the major religions, inevitably have an impact on them. The majority of folklore is limited to the description of ancillary beliefs. However, folklore can also be influenced by the shapes that genres like the epic take.

The authors and audiences of written and spoken literature pieces are different. The memory of authorship is never totally gone in oral cultures, although it is generally not very important. This is sometimes the case with songs, but not myths, folktales, and rarely epics. That being said, intellectual property rights are not applied to these genres. Songs and recitations are often connected to specific groups or events, such as clans. However, typically, no single author is identified. That being said, the absence does not suggest a communal composition process. Every reciter will

present their versions, some of which will be adopted by speakers who come after them and for whom the prior version served as a model. Oral transmission of an original can only occur with writing and oral recitations in literate societies, such as the Vedas or Homer. Writing adds a new dimension to verbal memory and allows constant reference to the correct version. Consequently, it appears that the emergence of aide-mémoire and mnemonic abilities originated in these preliterate communities.

The folktale, song (including laments, praise songs, and work songs), folk theatre, myth, and, closely related, folklore and historical recitation are the primary oral genres other than the epic. Additionally, there are the proverb and riddle, which are minor genres.

In scholarly practice, these genres are characterized by their distinct forms, purposes, and content, which are somewhat related to their audience, even though they are not often given distinct identities in local languages. Folktales are rarely viewed as anything other than fiction in its broadest meaning, while other genres—aside from song—have entirely different relationships with truth. Recitations and songs in exclusively oral communities cover every aspect of life, including theology and cosmology.

When early cultures developed written language, the religious domain was typically integrated through books related to a religion's canon or its most significant scriptures; oral literature was then left to deal with the periphery, encompassing charms, magic, and fairy tales.

Like any other writing, oral literature requires careful consideration of the situational context, the audience, and the speaker. Recitations in a religious or ritual ceremony and the type of stories recounted at a *veillée* (a small private gathering for storytelling) in Europe differ significantly in terms of intention, form, and content. Because of these distinctions, attempting to analyze culture, symbolism, or myth comprehensively by combining all these genres carries the risk of combining levels of communication that are best left to separate interpretations.

“Media is literature in a hurry.” – Mathew Arnold

What Mathew Arnold said about media holds true even today but with literature things have undergone a tremendous change. Today it has become a part of media and extended its limits in different dimensions. But to quote Francesca Baker's words, “Literature itself is media, a tool for messaging, communication and art.”(Nair, 108).

The revolution in media studies was started by Marshall McLuhan, who is recognized as the Father of the field and whose theory that ‘the medium is the message’ was influential. McLuhan's emphasis that the medium be considered a primary rather than a secondary analysis has been a critical factor in the broader movement in the humanities and social sciences to shift attention to the process, social context, performance, and other seemingly secondary or non-essential aspects of texts or artefacts, even though it was not the only academic practice to do so. This movement has influenced contemporary media theory and literary theory, which has focused more on the material circumstances of acts of communication. Historical studies on writing technologies have given way to more recent research on new media phenomenology and how using new media affects our perception of the world. For instance, a generation of academics was taught to view literature as a media subgenre by the significant work of German literary theorist Friedrich Kittler. His historicist approach focuses primarily on literature as a means of producing data mainly determined by the technologies of reproduction and archiving within its historical and cultural context.

The History and the sociocultural practices of the ethnic group of Kallars from the Vijayanagar dynasty to the Colonial period, presented in the Sahitya Akademi award-winning (2011) novel *The Bastion*, initially written in Tamil(2008) and translated into English in the year 2021 and in the Tamil movie *Aravaan* (2012) parts of the sociocultural practices of the ethnic group of Kallars has been recorded. The name of the very group represents their source of income, which is robbing and

guarding the city. The traditions they follow when the new member goes to rob for the first time with his group, the practices that are done while robbing, the celebration done after the robbery, their honesty and the rules and regulations in distributing the grains bought by selling the robbed jewels, their way of worshipping their god Karrupu, the customs followed when someone makes mistakes are described both in the novel and the Movie with some minor changes. They are as follows:

The practice of making offerings at the grave of Mondi has its own back story. When the Tatanur people went for robbery to Naduvapalayam, which is located on the northern bank of river Vaigai, Mondi was the one who inserted his head through the hole made by his group members to rob Kanaka Lingam Pillai, thinking that everybody had slept. But unfortunately, the people in the house were aware and awake. That day, when Mondi inserted his head through the kannavasal, he got chopped off his head. The practice of offering-making at the grave of Mondi arises after this.

Since then, it had become unbreakable custom on the part of anyone who wanted to make their maiden attempt at doing the kannam (making a hole in the wall of a house to enter and steal) had to make their routine offering Mondi at his grave..... in course of time, Mondi's clan began worshipping a palmyra in his memory. A separate sect from among the Kazhuvan's caste assumed its own identity as the palmyra sect. (Venkatesan 147).

The same event is the introductory scene of the Movie Aravaan. The group of people calls each other while robbing as 'Karrupa' and one of the Karuupans got chopped off his head in the Movie, too. Numerous incidents in the novel and the Movie describe the sociocultural practices of the Ethnic group of Kallars. The very incident justifies the argument that the History projected or described through literature or media can be either positive or negative. And it also constructs an identity of a particular group or an individual. For those who do not know the reason behind the custom, it is essential to know but not get influenced negatively.

As a result, it is evident from the ideas and arguments already covered that sociocultural narratives, whether narratives or the media, can be used to construct or realize the identity of the self or a particular group. Regarding identity, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural approach and Bakhtin's idea of cultural discourse are essential in narratives. It also heavily incorporates folklore and oral traditions. The cultural legacy is passed down through Oral traditions over generations, whereas folklore comprises epics, songs, legends, and even written versions. They both help people to know their unsung History, whether they are literate or illiterate. In the case of media, movies based on historical content help people know their History. It also reveals the forbidden History to both literate and illiterate people. In the postmodern era, movies made through digital media can create positive or negative impacts. Why? Because History can be from the Stone Age to the present, we have come across many centuries and civilized ourselves. The savage men can also be shown in the movies while recalling History. Let us not get negatively influenced by them. Thus, the sociocultural narratives in literature and media can either make a man aware of his identity and History or badly influence the individual to adapt himself to the savage mind of the uncivilized men's practices. In the postmodern era, it is well and good only when someone knows his History and self-identity and does not get bad influences from them.

References

1. Venkatesan. *The Bastion*. Translated by Pattu M Boopathi, Sahitya Akademi, 2021.
2. Babu, Chithrakala. *Dictionary of Contemporary Theory and Cultural Studies*. Edited by Kalyani Vallath, Bodhi Tree Books and Publications, 2019.
3. Bamberg, Michael. "Who Am I? Narration and Its Contribution to Self and Identity." *Theory & Psychology*, vol. 21, no. 1, Feb. 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354309355852>.

4. Gee, James Paul. "Social Linguistics and Literacies." Taylor & Francis, 1989.
5. Griffin-Fillier, Lorna. *The Storied Self: The Effects of Spinal Cord Injury on Identity Narratives*. Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2014,,<https://core.ac.uk/download/33557022.pdf>.
6. Herman, Luc, and Bart Vervaeck. "The Handbook of Narrative Analysis." Wiley eBooks, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118458204>
7. Josephine. "Role of Mass Media in Literature." *International Journal Of Innovative Research In Technology*, vol. Volume 8, no. Issue 9, ISSN: 2349-6002, Feb. 2022, p. 637. ijirt.org/master/publishedpaper/IJIRT154057_PAPER.pdf
8. Metting, Fred. "Exploring Oral Traditions Through the Written Text." *The Journal of Reading*, vol. 38, no. 4, Jan. 1995, eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ494557.
9. Minervini, Amy, et al. *Write What Matters*. Idaho Pressbooks, idaho.pressbooks.pub/write/chapter/storytelling-narration-and-the-who-i-am-story.
10. Nair, Tushar. "Impact of Media in Literature." *Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, Mar. 2022, p. 108.
11. Warschauer, Mark. "A Sociocultural Approach to Literacy and Its Significance for CALL." , *Nexus: The Convergence of Research & Teaching Through New Information Technologies*, https://education.uci.edu/uploads/7/2/7/6/72769947/a_sociocultural_approach_to_literacy_and_its_significance_for_call.pdf.